

PUBLIC STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY WITH KENYAN YOUTH REJECTING THE FINANCE BILL 2024

June 28, 2024

For Immediate Release

We, the undersigned coalition of youth civil society actors from across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, stand in unwavering solidarity with the youth of Kenya who have united to reject the Finance Bill 2024. We recognize the critical role that young people play in shaping the future of our nations and are deeply concerned about the adverse impacts this bill will have on their lives and livelihoods.

The Finance Bill 2024 proposes a series of regressive tax measures that will disproportionately affect the youth, many of whom are already facing significant economic challenges. These measures include increased taxes on essential goods and services, which will exacerbate the cost-of-living crisis and hinder access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

We echo the sentiments of countless Kenyans who have voiced their opposition to this bill through peaceful protests, public forums, and social media campaigns. Their message is clear: economic policies must prioritize the well-being of all citizens, not just a privileged few.

Moreover, young people feel that the current administration's governance has been marred by evident largesse and wastage of public resources. Young people across Kenya feel deeply disillusioned by the blatant disregard for prudent financial management and the excessive spending on non-essential projects. This has led to a loss of trust in public institutions and has exacerbated feelings of disenfranchisement among the youth. We call on the government to prioritize transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility to restore faith in our governance systems.

We join the Kenyan youth in their call for a more equitable and just economic policy that prioritizes the well-being of all citizens. We condemn violence instilled by the protestors, Police, and armed forces. It is imperative that the government listens to the voices of its young people and takes immediate action to address their legitimate concerns. In this spirit of solidarity, we urge the Kenyan government to:

1. **Engage in Inclusive Dialogue:** Initiate open and inclusive consultations with youth representatives, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to understand the full impact of the proposed bill and explore alternative solutions that promote economic justice.
2. **Prioritize Youth Empowerment:** Develop policies that support youth empowerment and economic opportunities, including access to quality education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support.
3. **Prioritize Meaningful Youth Engagement:** The government of the Republic of Kenya should ensure an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and government in policy-making processes by ensuring that youth are consulted, their respective contributions are valued, and their ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of all government policies, strategies and programmes.
4. **Ensure Equitable Taxation:** Design a fair and progressive taxation system that does not disproportionately burden the youth and other vulnerable groups. The government must ensure that tax policies are designed to reduce inequality and promote social justice.
5. **Respect the Right to Protest:** Uphold the constitutional rights of citizens to peacefully protest and express their views without fear of retribution or violence. We call on the government to respect the lives of its citizens and ensure that security forces act with restraint and respect for human rights.
6. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability:** Strengthen mechanisms for public accountability and transparency in the drafting and implementation of financial legislation. The government must ensure that citizens have access to information and are actively involved in the decision-making process.

We commend the Kenyan youth for their courage and determination in standing up for their rights and the future of their country. Their activism is a powerful testament to the strength of democracy and the importance of civic engagement. As a coalition of youth civil society organizations, we pledge our continued support and solidarity with the youth of Kenya in their fight for a fair and just society.

We also strongly condemn the brutal acts of violence and excessive force used by the Kenyan authorities against peaceful protesters exercising their constitutional right to assemble and express their grievances. The reports of deaths and injuries are alarming

and unacceptable. It is unthinkable that government forces would meet protesters with such brutality as to indiscriminately kill children and peaceful protestors alike. We condone with the families of those who have lost their loved ones, and we demand a thorough investigation into these incidents and hold accountable those responsible for the violence.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Kenya and urge the government to respect their rights and engage in dialogue to address their concerns. The use of force against unarmed protesters is a violation of human rights and undermines democracy. We call on the international community to join us in condemning these acts and supporting the people of Kenya in their quest for justice and peace.

In unity and solidarity,

